The NCCN 23rd Annual Conference: Improving the Quality, Effectiveness, and Efficiency of Cancer Care

Robert W. Carlson, MD

The NCCN 23rd Annual Conference: Improving the Quality, Effectiveness, and Efficiency of Cancer Care attracted more than 1,600 registrants from across the United States and the globe, including oncologists (in both community and academic settings), oncology fellows, nurses, pharmacists, and other health care professionals involved in the care of patients with cancer. The breadth of topics presented at the conference is a reflection of the impact NCCN and the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines) have on people with cancer and their families. This special issue of JNCCN—Journal of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network presents these Highlights as a synopsis of the proceedings.

During the Conference, esteemed NCCN Guidelines panel members presented the latest best practices in the treatment of patients with cancer and NCCN Guidelines updates for various diseases, including prostate, colon & rectal, kidney, breast, non-small cell lung, and hematopoietic cancers, as well as multiple myeloma, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and melanoma. Additionally, 3 brand new NCCN Guidelines were presented: Cancer in People Living with HIV, Management of Immunotherapy-Related Toxicity, and Uveal Melanoma.

NCCN experts also discussed cancer care in special situations and emerging treatments. For example, 2 NCCN Guidelines Panel Chairs, Maria D’ans, MD and Robert A. Swarm, MD, both from Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine, presented ways to adapt the NCCN Guidelines for Pain and Palliative Care to meet varying levels of resources. The NCCN Framework aims to provide adapted guidelines for low- and middle-resource countries to improve the experience of patients with cancer. NCCN Frameworks are a few of several tools that can improve cancer care in the developing world. Dr. Dans also discussed another of these tools, the NCCN Harmonized Guidelines for Sub-Saharan Africa, a joint project with the NCCN, American Cancer Society, Clinton Health Access Initiative, and African Cancer Coalition and some of its members, which were developed to harmonize NCCN recommendations with local guidelines across Africa and to make best use of available services and resources.

Another presentation focused on cancer treatment during pregnancy. Estimates suggest that nearly 30% of patients diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) are younger than 49 years old, and approximately half are women. For many of these women, childbearing concerns are a major factor as they start treatment with tyrosine kinase inhibitors, which are known to be teratogenic. During her presentation at the conference, Ellin Berman, MD, from Memorial Sloan Kettering, identified the challenges in helping women undergoing treatment for CML who want to have children, emphasizing the importance of an individualized and multidisciplinary approach to management.

Finally, Patrick A. Brown, MD, from The Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins University, and Bijal Shah, MD, from Moffitt Cancer Center, discussed the novel drugs that are being investigated in patients with ALL, such as potent later-generation tyrosine kinase inhibitors, antibody-drug conjugates, bispecific monoclonal antibodies, and chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapies.
Additional On-Site Activities

Other programs held on site included the 2018 Nursing Program: Advancing Oncology Nursing, the NCCN Oncology Fellows Program: New Horizons in Quality Cancer Care, and various lunch and dinner symposia. The NCCN Foundation announced Young Investigator Awards for 4 of the country’s most promising new cancer investigators.

The NCCN Conference provides a rare opportunity for the many different voices in cancer care to break out of their siloes and share perspectives with one another. So many different groups are working to improve the lives of people with cancer. The NCCN Annual Conference provides not just the opportunity for expert clinicians to share the latest research in their specialties, but they can also hear from other stakeholders about how we can all work together to improve cancer care in the future. Additionally, eligible conference-goers were able to earn up to 17.25 credits for continuing education during the event.

During the NCCN General Poster Session, researchers presented more than 100 posters across 2 days, including studies focused on clinical oncology, epidemiology/risk, best practices in implementation and use of clinical practice guidelines, quality improvement, outcomes and health services research, and others.

The Patient Advocacy Pavilion included representatives from a record number of patient advocacy groups, more than 25 in all. During a special reception, advocates expressed how important it was to be able to speak for patients directly to the nurses and clinicians who most need to hear from them.

During the conference, JNCCN added 4 new sites to JNCCN360 (JNCCN360.org), a network of tumor-specific microsites that provide users with carefully curated content. In addition to the sites for breast, non-small cell lung, and kidney cancers, and multiple myeloma, JNCCN360 microsites launched for colorectal and ovarian cancers, melanoma, and CML.

JNCCN360 includes video discussions with clinical leaders, medical literature summaries, news briefs, and patient resources. One of the most exciting features is the JNCCN Spotlights series, which discusses the safe and effective use of single-agent therapies from within the NCCN Guidelines and the NCCN Drugs & Biologics Compendium (NCCN Compendium). JNCCN Spotlights provide clinical recommendations from practitioners who have hands-on experience with that therapy, including principal investigators, NCCN Guidelines panel members, and other thought leaders in oncology.

NCCN Beyond the Conference

Ultimately, people with cancer and their caregivers are the reason we are all here. Not only are we working hard to keep up with rapidly expanding diagnoses and care options, we’re helping make sure that cancer care worldwide becomes increasingly patient-centric, and that effort continues all year. The NCCN Annual Conference is only one facet of the work that NCCN does as we strive to be the world leader in defining and advancing high-quality, high-value cancer care. Upcoming events include a policy summit on “Policy Strategies for the ‘New Normal’ in Health Care to Ensure Access to High Quality Cancer Care,” in Washington, DC on June 25, and the NCCN 13th Annual Congress: Hematologic Malignancies in New York City in September. We also hope you will join us for the NCCN 24th Annual Conference, March 21 to 23, 2019, at the Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Florida. In the meantime, please visit NCCN.org for more information and to access programs such as the NCCN Guidelines and to watch, and participate in, NCCN’s continuing evolution.